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FM AMEMBASSY BEIJING
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2892
INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY 0072
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIJING 024422

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DEPT FOR DRL, EAP/CM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/08/2031

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CH](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: CPA'S LIU BAINIAN ON ORDINATION OF XUZHOU BISHOP

REF: HONG KONG 4610

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY POLITICAL INTERNAL UNIT CHIEF SUSAN THORNTON. REASONS 1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Vice-Chairman of the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) Liu Bainian defended the November 30 ordination of Bishop Wang Renlei as the auxiliary bishop in Xuzhou (reftel), Jiangsu Province, saying that the Chinese Government gave advance notice of the appointment to the Vatican and that the appointment was necessary to serve the Catholic population in Xuzhou Diocese. Liu said he believes the relationship between the Chinese government and the Vatican will improve over time, at least in the long term, commenting that further dialogue is required to resolve differences. Poloff urged the CPA to pursue coordination with the Vatican in future ordinations.
End summary.

¶2. (C) CPA Vice-Chairman Liu Bainian told poloff December 5 that China acted "properly" in ordaining Bishop Wang Renlei the auxiliary bishop in Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province. Liu said that he had asked Chinese officials "to inform Rome about Wang's appointment in advance of the ordination through diplomatic channels." Liu confirmed that officials passed this message prior to Wang's ordination, but said he did not know how far in advance the message was transmitted.

¶3. (C) Defending Wang's November 30 ordination, which was done without Vatican approval, Liu claimed that the Xuzhou Diocese needed to prepare a successor in case the current bishop, 94-year old Qian Yurong, becomes ill or dies. Liu said 42 dioceses in China currently lack bishops. Wang's ordination will prevent a leadership gap in Xuzhou, which would harm faithful parishioners there. Describing the selection process, Liu stated that several Xuzhou priests had nominated Wang and that Bishop Qian, parish priests, and unspecified representatives of Xuzhou parishioners had unanimously elected Wang as bishop.

¶4. (C) Liu said he remains optimistic about the future of China-Vatican relations, at least over the long term. Both sides share a desire to improve relations, he posited, asserting that the Pope "loves China" but is influenced by advisors who dislike China because of its political system. Liu asserted that the Pope's December 2 statement following Wang's ordination was milder than the Vatican's previous such statement, revealing that Vatican attitudes toward China "are softening." Poloff urged the CPA to pursue timely coordination with the Vatican in future ordinations.

¶5. (C) Liu said the Chinese government wants further dialogue with the Vatican to resolve differences over how to select bishops, but will not cede this authority to the Vatican. Rome's refusal to approve bishops in the past, Liu said, has made it necessary for China to proceed with appointments on its own. With 42 dioceses lacking bishops and another ten current bishops in their 90s, China has no choice but to move ahead on appointments to serve the Catholic faithful, Liu concluded.

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